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# The Web of Life

William J. Petersen

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## The Web of Life

On February 26, 1855, the Dubuque Literary Institute met to hear Lucius H. Langworthy deliver his second lecture on the history of Dubuque. "Our prosperity seems to point to a glorious future", the pioneer declared. "Our progress has been steady, and the importance of our location is now settled beyond a question. . . . The fact, that eleven churches and a number of schools, besides literary and scientific societies, are sustained by our citizens, indicates we can already offer to immigrants the advantages of older cities, and that we have all the social and intellectual resources of the Atlantic States." Through "seminaries of learning" and "literary institutions", Langworthy concluded, Dubuque was destined to become the very "Athens of the West".

The Dubuque pioneers might look back with pride at their progress since they first entered the Black Hawk Purchase in 1833. Religious, educational, social, and cultural attainments had kept pace with the economic and political development. These, together with the homespun amusements and workaday activity, form the web of pioneer life.



Religion was a powerful force in frontier Dubuque. The Reverend Aratus Kent preached the first Protestant sermon in Ezekiel Lockwood's log cabin on Locust Street during the summer of 1833. In the following summer the Reverend Barton Randle and his Methodist flock built a one-story log church measuring twenty by twenty-six feet and costing \$255. Seven women and five men made up the membership of this, the first church in Iowa. Five preachers faithfully ministered to this congregation before a new and larger structure was erected in 1840. During this time the Methodist Church was used by various denominations, served as a courthouse and a schoolhouse, and housed the meeting to consider the incorporation of the town of Dubuque — in a word, functioned as a center of religion, education, and government.

Meanwhile, Father Charles Felix Van Quickenbourn conducted the first Roman Catholic service in the cabin of Mrs. Brophy during the summer of 1833. On August 15, 1835, the cornerstone of the first Catholic Church in Iowa was laid at Dubuque. Dedicated as Saint Raphael's Church by Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, the handsome stone edifice was destined to serve as the Cathedral for the Territory of Iowa when Bishop Mathias Loras arrived on April 19, 1839.



There were many other faiths represented at the Dubuque lead mines. On May 11, 1836, the *Dubuque Visitor* declared that another "Minister of the Gospel is needed among us — one who can reason, preach, and sing; and *enforce the fourth commandment.*" As if in answer to this plea the cornerstone of the first Presbyterian Church was laid with appropriate ceremonies on July 18, 1836. A Baptist congregation was organized in 1840, the Episcopalians formed their first church in 1843, and the Christian Church was established in the following year. Before the decade closed beginnings had been made by the African Baptist Church, the Unitarian Church, the Congregational Church, and the Dubuque County Bible Society.

The influence of the church was soon manifested. On September 30, 1837, a writer in the *Iowa News* expressed delight with "the order and decorum which prevails in every part of our community" after the town trustees adopted the ordinance relating to the observance of the Sabbath. Both Protestant and Catholic congregations were active in the temperance crusade. However, in addition to unbelievers there were some wayward brethren whose conduct was considered reprehensible. "I wish to notice a habit quite prevalent in this city," wrote one who signed his name "Chris-



tian" in the *Miners' Express* for February 23, 1848. "It is that of going to church for the purpose of taking a comfortable snooze during divine service. This miserable and sinful practice is quite fashionable and followed extensively by certain ladies and gentlemen, especially some who attend the Methodist and Congregational churches."

The Dubuque pioneers lost no time in establishing schools. The first schoolhouse in the Black Hawk Purchase was completed at Dubuque in December of 1833. Bald-headed George Cubbage was selected as the first schoolmaster for the thirty-five pupils who attended. Subsequently, Barrett Whittemore and Mrs. Caroline Dexter taught school at Dubuque. In 1836 Mrs. Louisa King opened a school for young ladies. On January 15, 1838, the Legislative Assembly passed an act authorizing a seminary of learning at Dubuque for the "instruction of young persons of both sexes in science and literature". Thomas S. Wilson, Lucius H. Langworthy, P. A. Lorimier, Joseph T. Fales, Benjamin Rupert, and Patrick Quigley were listed as incorporators. The first classical school in Iowa was established at Dubuque in 1839 by Thomas H. Benton, Jr.

More schools sprang up during the following decade. In the fall of 1841 the *Miners' Express* called attention to the English, classical, and math-



emational school opened in the residence of Bishop Mathias Loras. A few months later C. F. Hardie started an "Evening School" in the basement of the Presbyterian Church. Professor Hardie, emphasizing particularly English, grammar, and arithmetic, charged four dollars tuition for a twelve-week term during which classes met four nights a week. Each pupil was required to "furnish his own light". In 1842 Miss Eberlee opened a school for the instruction of children of both sexes. Miss Eberlee taught English, French, and German as well as needle and fancy work. These were all private schools, for Dubuque had not used the authority to establish free public schools. In 1844 a newly created school board agreed to pay the costs of educating eligible children in the private schools, but as late as 1849 there were no public school buildings in the city.

The dissemination of knowledge, however, was not restricted to the schools. On December 27, 1837, a number of Dubuque citizens met at the home of James L. Langworthy and formed a "Literary Association" upon the lyceum principle. Timely topics were discussed, the lyceum affording an excellent opportunity for the development of individual forensic talent. Thus, on December 1, 1847, the *Miners' Express* announced a meeting "over Terry's Saloon" to discuss the question:



"Resolved that the Wilmot Proviso is right and ought to be sustained by the American people."

Numerous lecturers appeared before Dubuque audiences, temperance and education being two popular themes. In September of 1838, Alonzo P. Phelps spoke on "Popular Education" in the Methodist Church. On November 3, 1843, the *Miners' Express* expressed delight with Professor Bonneville's very "convincing" lecture on mesmerism. The editor witnessed such experiments as "paralyzing different limbs, shutting the eyes, closing the mouth, putting the subject in a magnetic state". It was said of Professor Bonneville that he could "stop a woman's tongue by merely shaking his finger at her." Skeptics were urged to attend. The large Irish population undoubtedly enjoyed the lecture by Mr. Mooney, the "distinguished and very popular Irish vocalist and lecturer" who appeared in December of 1847. Mr. Spencer gave exhibitions of "Animal Magnetism", while Dr. Reynolds lectured on "Astronomy" over Terry's saloon. On May 3, 1848, the *Miners' Express* urged citizens to attend the "novel exhibition" by Mrs. Hayden, who was hailed as the "American Sybil" and the "first and only female magician in the world."

A welcome addition to the cultural life of Dubuque was supplied by Joseph T. Fales who con-



ducted a singing school in the Methodist Church on the evening of May 25, 1836. In November, 1838, Azor Richardson taught the science of sacred music in the Methodist Church. Mr. and Miss Scott advertised in 1843 that they would be pleased to instruct students on the "Piano Forte, and musical instruments generally". On December 1, 1847, the *Miners' Express* announced a concert by the Dubuque Philharmonic Society in the Congregational Church. The programme included anthems, solos, and choruses, together with the "most popular Glees and Secular" melodies. "The members of the Society", the *Miners' Express* declared, "flatter themselves that their Concert will afford an unusually agreeable evening's entertainment." Bands and church choirs afforded a further outlet for the musically inclined.

An index of the reading tastes of the Dubuque pioneers is revealed by the books William Lawther offered for sale in his store in 1842. In addition to the *Encyclopaedia Americana*, Walker's *Dictionary*, and Comstock's *Mineralogy*, he advertised *Biographies of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence* and Chitty's works on *Pleadings* and on *Contracts*. Goldsmith's *Animated Nature*, Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Pope's *Essay on Man*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Cobbett's *Advice to*



*Young Men*, Butler's *Hudibras*, and Wirt's *Life of Patrick Henry* were other volumes on sale. Jane Porter's two classics, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* and *Scottish Chiefs*, must have vied with the works of Shakespeare, Scott, and Byron for public favor. Among the school books listed were Smith's *Arithmetic*, Murry's *Grammar*, and a series of "Elementary Spellings Books and Eclectic Readers". Surely the most fastidious reader could have found something to suit his taste on William Lawther's well-stocked shelves.

The pioneers found time for fun and entertainment. In 1838 the Iowa Thespians organized, and Joseph Jefferson appeared the following year with his professional actors. Steamboat excursions were popular; dog and animal shows, tight rope walkers, sleight-of-hand artists, and colorful circus performers helped to enliven frontier life. Probably most of the men and boys indulged in fishing and hunting. Skating and sleighriding were popular winter sports. At home or in church, in lyceum or at militia muster, at choir practice or fire drill, the Dubuque pioneers found both pleasure and profit in Territorial times.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN